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The situation in the Middle East

Measures to eliminate international terrorism

Security Council
Fifty-eighth year

Letter dated 14 January 2003 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I wish to refer to the recent letter dated 17 December 2002 (A/57/669-S/2002/1383) from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic addressed to the Secretary-General.

In his letter, the Syrian representative endeavours to deny what is well known and extensively documented, namely, that Syria is among the world's most active State sponsors of terrorism. Syrian financing, support and complicity in murderous attacks committed by groups which deliberately target civilians have been a cornerstone of Syrian strategy for decades.

In this connection, I should like to point out the following:

1. The following are among the terrorist groups operating under the auspices of the Government of Syria: Hizbullah, Hamas, Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), the Palestinian Liberation Front, the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front, The Vanguards of the Liberation War-Sa'iqa, Fatah-the Intifida, and the Communist Revolutionary Party.

2. Syria provides these groups with safe harbour, training areas, financial and logistical support, all in clear violation of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001), and in a manner which threatens international peace and security. Syrian sponsorship is used to recruit, incite, organize, and fund terrorist activity not only in Israel, but other locales around the world. This support includes sheltering several of the most notorious terrorist criminals, including PIJ secretary-general Ramadan Abdullah Shallah and senior Hamas official Mousa Abu Marzook as well as the political bureau of Hamas, which operates openly out of Damascus under the authority of Khaled Mashaal.

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3. The attacks for which these groups are responsible are some of the bloodiest in recent years. They include the Hamas suicide bombing at the Park Hotel in Netanya that killed 30 Israelis on the first night of the Jewish festival of Passover; the PIJ bus bombing of 5 June 2002 at the Megiddo Junction which killed 18 Israelis; the PIJ bus bombing near the Israeli city of Hadera on 21 October 2002 which killed 14 Israelis; the murder of Israeli Cabinet Minister Rehavam Ze'evi in Jerusalem on 17 October 2001 by agents of the PFLP. In the 12 months since Syria has been a member of the United Nations Security Council alone, 98 Israelis have been killed in terrorist attacks perpetrated by organizations whose leadership operates from Damascus. These terrorist atrocities have received the full support of the Syrian administration, which frequently praises them in the official State-controlled media, for example, in a broadcast on Radio Damascus from 9 May 2002, which stated: "The wonderful and special suicide attacks, which were executed by some of the sons of the Palestinian nation, is a practical declaration before the whole world of the way to liberate Arab Palestinian land from Israeli colonialism."

4. The Syrian letter reiterates several times the spurious claim that these terrorist headquarters are merely "information offices" and asserts that it is "obvious" that the staff of these offices could not carry out attacks against Israel "because they are far from the territory in which these actions are taking place". This assertion deliberately ignores the sophisticated communications networks, as well as electronic funds transfers, that are indispensable to today's terrorists. Nor does it take account of the practice of smuggling of weapons and logistical material, which has afforded crucial support and operational instructions to terrorists. Israel has identified several terrorist operatives that were specifically designated liaisons between officials in Damascus and terrorist cells in the West Bank and Gaza including Tarek Az Aldin and Taabat Mardwai, both of whom were responsible for relaying instructions from Damascus to PIJ terrorist operatives sent to carry out suicide bombings and other terrorist attacks.

5. It is a measure of the degree of Syrian complicity in terrorism that its attempted defence is to claim that it merely provides safe haven to the "information offices" of terrorist groups, but not to the groups themselves. This claim is made as if to suggest that hosting offices which only recruit terrorist operatives and glorify, disseminate, encourage and incite suicide bombings against innocent civilians are somehow acceptable. Even were such dubious claims regarding the nature of these offices to be believed, their existence would still constitute a violation of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) and other basic principles of international law which require, inter alia, that States refrain from providing any support, whether active or passive, to entities or persons involved in terrorist acts; deny safe haven to those who finance, plan, support or commit terrorist attacks; and ensure that those who finance, plan, support or perpetrate terrorist attacks are brought to justice.

6. With respect to Hizbullah, the organization continues its unprovoked cross-border violations of the Blue Line, threatening the stability of the entire region. In addition, Hizbullah continues to pose a serious threat worldwide in the light of its long involvement in international terrorist acts, its network of terrorist cells and contacts around the globe, and its declared intention of spreading suicide terrorism against the West as recently reiterated by Hizbullah secretary general and close Syrian ally Hassan Nasrallah. Syria supports Hizbullah's activities not only by providing the group safe harbour in Syrian-controlled territory, but by facilitating weapons transfers through Damascus, and providing political, financial and

logistical assistance. In a shameless act of duplicity, Syria's continued vocal and active support for Hizbullah and its violations of the Blue Line come at a time when Syria sits on the Security Council and has voted in favour of Security Council resolutions against terrorism as well as resolutions, such as resolution 1428 (2002), which confirm that Israel has fulfilled its obligations under resolution 425 (1978) and call for respect of the Blue Line and for the implementation of Lebanese obligations.

7. Syria claims that Israel's allegations with respect to Hizbullah's illegal violations of the Blue Line, and regarding the organization's support from both Syria and Lebanon, are countered by the Arab summit conference and the conference of French-speaking countries that were held recently in Lebanon. The attempt to present the mere fact that some States attend meetings in Lebanon as evidence of support for Lebanon's position can only be described as bizarre, especially in the face of numerous Security Council resolutions that assert the contrary. At the same time, this perverse logic should serve as a caution to States that participation in such events is likely to be twisted by Syrian representatives to suggest an implied condoning of terrorism. It is a similarly perverse logic that enables Syria to call for respect for the territorial and political independence of Lebanon while maintaining an occupation of that country and using its territory to pursue a subversive terrorist strategy against Israeli citizens across the Lebanese border.

8. Israel reiterates its commitment to achieving a negotiated peace settlement with Syria on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). But hopes for peaceful coexistence cannot be realized as long as Syria continues to believe, and broadcast to the world, that the deliberate murder of Israeli civilians are acts which should be encouraged, glorified and supported.

In the final analysis, the Syrian letter does little more than expose the intolerable contradiction inherent in having a State which is a foremost sponsor of terrorism sitting as a member of the Security Council. We call on Syria to live up to its international obligations and to reject, once and for all — in word, spirit and deed — the use of terrorism and suicide bombings as a political weapon so as to restore its legitimacy as a member of the international community.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of this letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 36 and 160, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Arye **Mekel**
Chargé d'affaires, a.i.